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An Appeal to the British Nation on
the Humanity and Policy of Forming
a National Institution for the Pre-
servation of Lives and Property
from Shipwreck

By

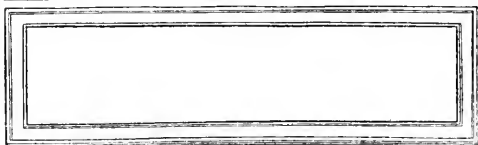
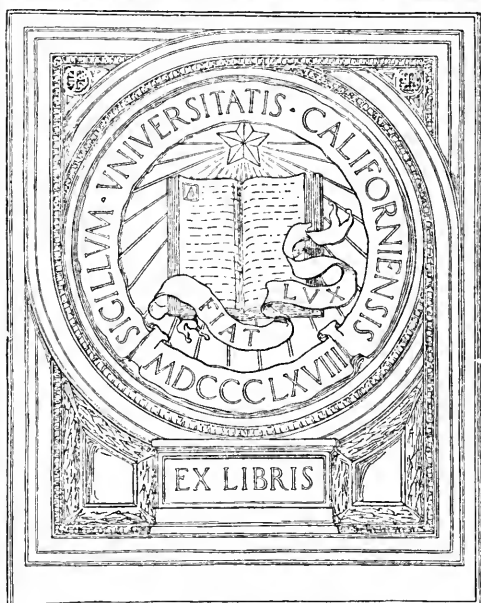
William Hillary

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UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA
AT LOS ANGELES



From the Author

AN APPEAL

TO THE

BRITISH NATION,

ON THE

HUMANITY AND POLICY

OF FORMING

A National Institution,

FOR THE PRESERVATION OF

LIVES AND PROPERTY FROM SHIPWRECK.

BY SIR WILLIAM HILLARY, BART.

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TO

THE KING.

SIRE,

FROM your Majesty's exalted station as Sovereign of the greatest maritime power on earth, and from the ardent zeal with which you have graciously extended your royal patronage to every measure which could promote the welfare and the glory of the British Navy, I have presumed, with the utmost deference, to dedicate the following pages to your Majesty.

With the most dutiful respect, I have the honour to be,

SIRE,

Your Majesty's

Most devoted subject and servant,

W. HILLARY.

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AN APPEAL,

&c.

FOR many years, and in various countries, the melancholy and fatal cases of shipwreck which I have witnessed, have excited a powerful interest in my mind for the situation of those who are exposed to this awful calamity; but the idea of the advantages which would result from the establishment of a national institution, for the preservation of human life from the perils of the sea, has only suggested itself to me since my residence on a part of the coast often exposed to the most distressing scenes of misery, and where the dreadful storms of the last autumn prevailed with unusual violence.

On some occasions, it has been my lot to witness the loss of many valuable lives, where, if there had been establishments previously formed for affording prompt relief, and encouragement given to those who might volunteer on such a cause, in all probability the greater part would

have been saved. At other times I have seen the noblest instances of self-devotion; men have saved the lives of their fellow-creatures at the peril of their own, without a prospect of reward if successful, and with the certainty that their families would be left destitute if they perished.

From these circumstances, I have been induced to wish, that the results of the experience, talent, and genius, of the most distinguished commanders and men of science should be united in the formation of one great institution, which would in itself embrace every possible means for the preservation of life from the hazards of shipwreck.

Though many distinguished officers have employed their time and attention, and often exposed their personal safety for this object, yet, throughout nearly the whole of the most dangerous parts of the coast, no means have been adopted, no precautions taken for affording assistance in cases of shipwreck. Winter after winter, we have the most distressing details of the deplorable consequences; lives have been lost, which might otherwise have been saved; acts have even sometimes been perpetrated at which humanity shudders, and which have

caused other nations to cast reproach and opprobrium on the British name.

But individual efforts, however meritorious in themselves, are unequal to produce all the benefits, or remedy all the evils, attendant on one of the most inevitable of perils to which (in the present state of society) human nature is exposed; and which is most likely to fall upon those who are in the very prime of manhood, and in the discharge of the most active and important duties of life. From the calamity of shipwreck no one can say that he may at all times remain free; and whilst he is now providing only for the safety of others, a day may come which will render the cause his own.

These are not arguments founded on the visionary contemplation of remote or improbable dangers. Their urgent necessity must be obvious to every mind. So long as man shall continue to navigate the ocean, and the tempests shall hold their course over its surface, in every age and on every coast, disasters by sea, shipwreck, and peril to human life, must inevitably take place; and with this terrible certainty before our eyes, the duty becomes imperative, that we should use every means to

obviate and to mitigate the disastrous consequences.

This subject in a peculiar manner appeals to the British people collectively and individually. For ages our seamen have been the acknowledged support of our splendour and our power, and until every thing which the ingenuity of man can suggest, and every inducement and regulation which social institutions can offer and arrange, have been combined into one great plan for their safety, we shall be wanting in our best duties to them, to our country, and to ourselves.

Local associations cannot call forth the energy which such a cause demands at our hands; they are only partial benefits, whilst the great evil remains unredressed. We have many noble institutions, widely spread through the extent of the British dominions, supported by voluntary contributions, and exalting our name above that of every other nation by our disinterested efforts in the cause of humanity; but this great and vital object to every Briton, seems alone to have been strangely and unaccountably overlooked, or only partially undertaken.

In bringing this deeply interesting subject

before the public, it is my ardent hope that it may call forth the attention of those better qualified to bring to perfection so important a work. Let this great national object but once arrest the attention of the public mind, and not any thing can prevent its completion.

The power of united effort, in the attainment of any great work of national benevolence, has never yet failed of success. The institution I have in view is even more a claim of justice than of benevolence; it peculiarly belongs to the greatest maritime nation on earth, and will, I trust, be deemed worthy the attention of the Admiralty of England, who have so long held their high station, with as much honour to themselves as benefit to their country.

But by whose immediate patronage the first measures for the organization of such a system may be honoured, or under the sanction of what names the requisite public meetings to carry them into effect may be announced, it would be the utmost presumption in me to anticipate; but it appears to me, that the immediate assembling of such meetings in London would best contribute to the establishment of this institution, on a permanent and extensive foundation.

To the consideration of such meetings, I most respectfully beg leave to submit:

That a national institution should be formed, equally worthy of Great Britain, important to humanity, and beneficial to the naval and commercial interests of the United Empire ; having for its objects,

First, The preservation of human lives from shipwreck ; which should always be considered as the first great and permanent object of the institution.

Secondly, Assistance to vessels in distress, which often immediately connects itself with the safety of the crews.

Thirdly, The preservation of vessels and property, when not so immediately connected with the lives of the people, or after the crews and passengers shall already have been rescued.

Fourthly, The prevention of plunder and depredations in case of shipwreck.

Fifthly, The succour and support of those persons who may be rescued ; the promptly obtaining medical aid, food, clothing, and shelter, for those whose destitute situation may require such relief, with the means to forward them to their homes, friends, or countries. The people and vessels of every nation, whether

in peace or war, to be equally objects of this Institution ; and the efforts to be made, and the recompenses to be given for their rescue, to be in all cases the same as for British subjects and British vessels.

Sixthly, The bestowing of suitable rewards on those who rescue the lives of others from shipwreck, or who assist vessels in distress ; and the establishment of a provision for the destitute widows or families of those who unhappily lose their lives on such occasions.

The objects of the Institution being thus defined, and having, I hope, already obtained the powerful support of those illustrious personages and distinguished characters in the state, under whose fostering care, as patrons and presidents, the system would have the best prospect of being brought to maturity ; it would only be requisite to proceed to the next duty of the meeting, which would be the formation of a numerous Committee, equally including liberal and enlightened men from all classes and departments of the state, naval and military officers, members of Trinity House and of Lloyd's, merchants and commanders in the East India and other services, &c.

In addition to this central Committee, it

would be requisite, in order to carry the objects of the society into active execution, that branches of the Institution, subject to its rules, should be formed in all the principal ports, and on the most dangerous sea-coasts of the United Kingdom; each having its own separate Committee, in direct communication with that in London, of which many of the gentlemen in the local Committees would, no doubt, also be members. But, on the general central meetings of presidents and Committee, in London, would devolve the primary measures for the permanent establishment of the Institution; the general system of finance, the formation of rules and regulations, and the plans for giving activity and effect to the whole.

Perhaps it might facilitate the progress of the measures in view, if the labour were divided, and two or more separate Committees or Boards were formed from the whole, consisting of individuals best qualified for the objects of each separate department, whose reports, before being finally adopted, should receive the sanction of the Institution at large.

Under this view of the subject, a Committee of finance would be desirable, whose duty, in the first instance, would be to arrange and pursue

the best and most active measures to diffuse a general knowledge of the objects and principles of the association ; and to obtain donations and subscriptions, for the purpose of carrying them into effect.

From the peculiarly interesting nature of this Institution, it is to be presumed, that this part of their duty would be found easy in its progress, and successful in its results.

When we see long columns filled with the first names in the country, with large sums placed opposite to them, for objects temporary in their nature, and small in importance compared with the present, which contemplates a widely circulated plan for the rescue of thousands of human beings now in existence, and an incalculable number yet unborn, from one of the most awful of all perils ;—who is there to whom such an Institution once became known that would refuse his aid ?

The names of every branch of the Royal Family are to be found at the head of all the benevolent Institutions of the empire.

From the nobility and gentry large donations and subscriptions may naturally be expected. The clergy of every class will, no doubt, be

foremost in the cause of humanity. To the whole body of the navy, the marines, and to the army, who, in the prosecution of their professional duties, encounter so many of the dangers of the sea, such an appeal will never be made in vain. Can it be supposed that there is one East India Director, one member of Lloyd's, an under-writer, a merchant, a ship-owner, or commander in the India or merchants' service, from whom a subscription, liberal in proportion to his means, will not be obtained? Nor will the generous aid of any class of society, I am persuaded, be wanting for such a purpose; and as a stimulus to the whole, by example in their donations, and by the widely-extended circle of their influence, the British females of every station in life will, I am convinced, particularly distinguish themselves in aid of this Institution.

From these opinions, which I so confidently entertain of the humanity and liberality of the British people, I rest firmly persuaded, that the most ample means will be easily and speedily obtained for every possible expenditure which can attend the objects of this Institution.

When the funds of the society are once esta-

blished, the duty of the Committee will be, to place the permanent superintendence and regulation of their finance under the proper control of the whole society.

A second Board, or Committee, should be formed from the most experienced and enlightened officers of the navy, seamen, engineers and scientific men, for the purpose of carrying the direct objects of the Institution into effect.

One of the most important duties of this Committee will be to combine together, into one concise and well-digested plan, the result of the joint knowledge and experience of the whole body, in plain and simple language, divested as much as possible of technical phraseology, and capable of being understood by every individual. This code of instruction should contain the best and most prompt measures to be adopted in every sort of danger to which a vessel can be exposed, and on whatever kind of coast, so that the most effectual assistance can be given, with the least possible loss of time, and with such means as in remote situations can most probably be obtained; and the Committee should be requested to report, from time to time, the result of those measures which

they had found from experience to be most successful.

It will be desirable that this Committee should suggest the most eligible plans for permanent establishments in all greater and lesser sea-ports, road-steads, and resorts for shipping, and particularly on remote, wild, and exposed parts of the coast, where life-boats, anchors, cables, hawsers, and the beneficial inventions of those enlightened and highly patriotic officers Captains Marryatt and Manby should be kept in constant readiness for use, with every means for the preservation of lives in danger, and the assistance of vessels in distress, according to the nature of the coasts on which the respective depôts may be established.

To carry these objects of the association into effect, it would be advantageous to arrange a plan for the formation and regulation of the crews of boats, and the persons to be employed on these occasions, as well those to direct, as others to execute the measures to be undertaken. The purchase, safe custody, and control over the use of the stores belonging to the Institution, would also form subjects of careful arrangement.

This department is perhaps the most important of the whole—it is the operative ; and

on its judicious formation, the means of prompt and effectual execution, the success of the most hazardous undertakings, the safety of those employed, and the rescue of those in peril, will unquestionably depend.

For these purposes, as well as every other connected with the society, the respective Committees proposed to be formed, in every port, and on every coast, will be of the most essential use. The zeal, and other requisite qualities, which the members of such Committees will naturally be supposed to possess, point them out as the most eligible persons to have the immediate direction of the measures to be adopted. From them also it is to be expected that the most experienced in nautical affairs may be selected to command.

To that department under which boats are to go out, and men are to risk their own lives, in their efforts to save those of their fellow-creatures, the utmost attention is due: that, when they are so employed, it shall be under the direction of the most skilful advice which the occasion can afford: that their boats and equipments shall be such as best to insure their safety, and that the crews shall be selected from the

bravest and most experienced persons who can be found.

To insure order and promptitude on these occasions, where the least delay or indecision may be to lose the opportunity of acting with effect, a previous and (as far as practicable) a permanent arrangement should be formed. Volunteers should be invited to enrol themselves from amongst the resident pilots, seamen, fishermen, boatmen, and others, in sufficient numbers to insure the greatest probability of having every aid at hand, which, in the moment of danger, may be requisite. Each man should have his department previously assigned, and the whole act under their respective leaders.

To these regulations might be added a system of signals, by which persons on board of vessels in distress could communicate the nature of the assistance of which they stood in need; and those on shore warn them of any danger, inform them of the aid they were going to afford, or give them any instructions requisite to their safety.

In addition to these means, a great source of aid to vessels in distress might be secured to be at all times within reach, by permanent and

judicious arrangements with pilot companies, steam vessels, anchor vessels, and trawl and other fishing boats, which, under proper indemnities, and for reasonable remuneration, would at all times contribute their assistance, and act under the regulations of the Institution.

But at the same time care should be taken not to trammel, by unnecessary regulations, the spontaneous efforts of those, who, actuated by a generous ardour, on the emergency of the moment, seize on the first means which present themselves, and often accomplish their object in a manner which, to a cooler calculation, would appear impracticable.

To expect a large body of men to enrol themselves, and be in constant readiness to risk their own lives for the preservation of those whom they have never known or seen, perhaps of another nation, merely because they are fellow-creatures in extreme peril, is to pay the highest possible compliment to my countrymen; and that on every coast there are such men, has been fully evinced, even under the present want of system, when the best means for their purpose are not supplied; when they are without any certainty of reward, and are under the peculiarly appalling consideration, that if they

perish, they may leave wives, children, and every one destitute who depend on them for support.

If, under such discouragement, we every year have so many instances of self-devotion, what might not be expected from the same men, when they knew that in the performance of their arduous duties, every possible means to execute them; with safety to themselves, and success to the objects of their efforts, would be supplied; that if they succeeded, they would be honoured and recompensed, according to their merits and situation in life; and if it were their lot to perish in so noble a cause, they had at least the consolation to know, beyond a doubt, that their families would not be left to deplore their loss in unprotected poverty.

To these objects the Institution ought unquestionably to extend, or it would be unworthy of the great country to which it belonged, and of the high patronage with which I hope it may be honoured.

Nor will I suppose that those whom I have specified are the only persons who will take an active part on such occasions. There is another class, who, from what I have individually seen, will, I am certain, become able and zealous

leaders,—not only the employed, but the half-pay officers of the navy, now so widely spread over the coasts of the United Kingdom. Living in retirement in time of peace, they would not allow their energies to sleep when their brother seamen were in danger, but come forward with the conscious feeling, that those distinguished characters who preside over the British navy would regard such meritorious services as being in the direct path of honour; and that to rescue a fellow-creature from the perils of shipwreck would not be less acceptable to their country than to subdue her enemies in battle.

Our late venerable sovereign conferred the baronetage on the gallant Viscount Exmouth (then Captain Pellew), for his noble and successful efforts, at the extreme hazard of his own life, to save the crew of an East Indiaman, wrecked at Plymouth, when the situation of every one on board appeared beyond the reach of human aid.

The whole class of the preventive service, with many departments of the revenue, could not be more honourably employed, and they must naturally feel that their brave exertions, on such occasions, would be fully estimated.

The assistance of medical men, who would

enrol themselves to be ready to attend, might frequently be of the utmost importance to succour and restore those who might have sustained severe injury, or whose lives might be nearly extinct.

In time of war, it might be advisable that a limited number of known, steady, and brave seamen, who had already distinguished themselves on these occasions, should be protected from the impress, by belonging to this service. The number need not be large, as the retired veterans of the navy, and the fishermen on the coast, would constitute the majority to be employed.

The nature and extent of the recompenses for time and trouble, and rewards for hazard of their own lives in the rescue of others, would form another important branch of the Institution for the labours of this Committee.

The qualifications for these rewards naturally form themselves into classes.

First, in case of successful efforts, where persons, at the risk of their own lives, save from imminent peril those of their fellow-creatures,—it should be established, beyond all doubt, that they are intitled to a premium of such sum for each life saved as the Institution may, on con-

sideration, agree upon. This might be fixed as not less than a certain sum, with power to extend it to a greater amount, to be decided by the Committee, according to the nature of the case; but, at all events, to the smallest of these rewards the parties to have an absolute claim, on furnishing unquestionable evidence of having saved a life.

In many cases of persons rescued from the wreck, saved amongst rocks, or when found washed by the breakers on shore, particularly on remote coasts, but too often exposed to scenes of lawless depredation, the parties should equally be entitled to reward.

Where lives are saved, without those employed hazarding their own, they should at least receive the lesser of the premiums before-mentioned.

Rewards should also be given where every possible effort has been made, though unhappily without success.

When vessels are actually in distress, proportionate premiums should be given to the first, second, and other boats which get alongside, and for other assistance.

The nature and extent of the remunerations for the preservation of vessels and property

after being stranded, or in various other situations of danger, would require regulation.

When a life is saved by a person who had been equally fortunate on a former occasion, his reward should be larger, and increase progressively for other successful efforts. In case of crime, the second offence is punished more severely than the first, and the third than the second. In meritorious acts, it were only sound policy that the rewards should bear a similar proportion.

Where an individual perishes in his attempts to rescue lives from shipwreck, or when assisting vessels in distress, his wife, children, or aged parents (if dependent on him for support), should at least have the same provision from the funds of the Institution, as they would have received from the nation, if he had been killed on board of a king's vessel in action with the enemy.

The Institution should also recompense for severe injuries, ascertained to have been unquestionably sustained in the actual performance of such services.

Ample and general powers should be given to confer rewards for such other acts as the Committee may consider justly entitled to them.

It might, perhaps, also be worthy the consideration of the Institution at large, whether any badge or medal conferred on a man who had saved a life from shipwreck, at the hazard of his own, might not have a very powerful effect. To many minds, even in the humblest walks of life, such a recompense would be more acceptable than a pecuniary reward, whilst a laudable ambition might be thus excited in others to imitate so meritorious an example.

To receive applications for rewards, to examine into the nature and extent of services performed, and to make reports, and forward certificates and recommendations to the general Committee, would become one of the most important duties of the local departments, on the judicious and faithful performance of which the honour and credit of the Institution would materially depend.

These appear to me to be the principal objects to which the attention of the two Committees should be directed in the original formation of the establishment, and subject to the decision of the general meetings of the Institution, to whom their reports should be submitted for final adoption.

It is to be presumed that various parts of the

interior of the United Kingdom will furnish considerable funds to the institution, without calling upon it for any aid ; that many of the great sea-ports may perhaps supply means equal to the amount of their expenditure, in their immediate district ; whilst there is a vast extent of the most rugged coasts lying far distant from any prompt assistance, on which, above all others, vessels are exposed to the greatest danger. For such places, establishments could only be formed at the greatest expense ; for it must be obvious, that from the solitude and remoteness of the surrounding country, only small pecuniary supplies could be obtained ; but where the seamen and fishermen ought to be stimulated by every possible incitement to take an active and decided part in the cause of humanity ; for on these very coasts the vessels belonging to the most distant ports might be lost, and the relatives of those who resided in the very interior of the kingdom might perish. The cause, therefore, becomes common to all, and it is no less just than politic that the whole amount of the funds obtained should centre in the Institution at large ; that there should not be any attempts made to establish separate interests, whilst from these funds the expenses of every

department should be supplied, the rewards be given, and the pensions guaranteed through the whole extent of the British dominions.

How far it may be desirable to apply for an act of parliament to establish the Institution into a chartered association, in order to secure the funds for payment of the pensions which may be granted, and for various other purposes, will remain for the general Committee to decide, when the whole has assumed a distinct form.

If those who are better qualified to judge of the measure do not conceive that it would be objectionable, I venture, with deference, to recommend, that other maritime nations should be invited to form similar establishments, so far as accords with their respective laws and usages, and to concur in mutual arrangements with Great Britain for the reciprocal aid of the subjects and vessels of each other.

Nor is the universal adoption of this system more imperatively demanded by those feelings which should incite us to afford our utmost aid to the people of every country, who may be in danger of shipwreck on our shores, than it is consistent with a wise and enlightened policy, which should extend our views from our own immediate coasts, to the most remote quarters of

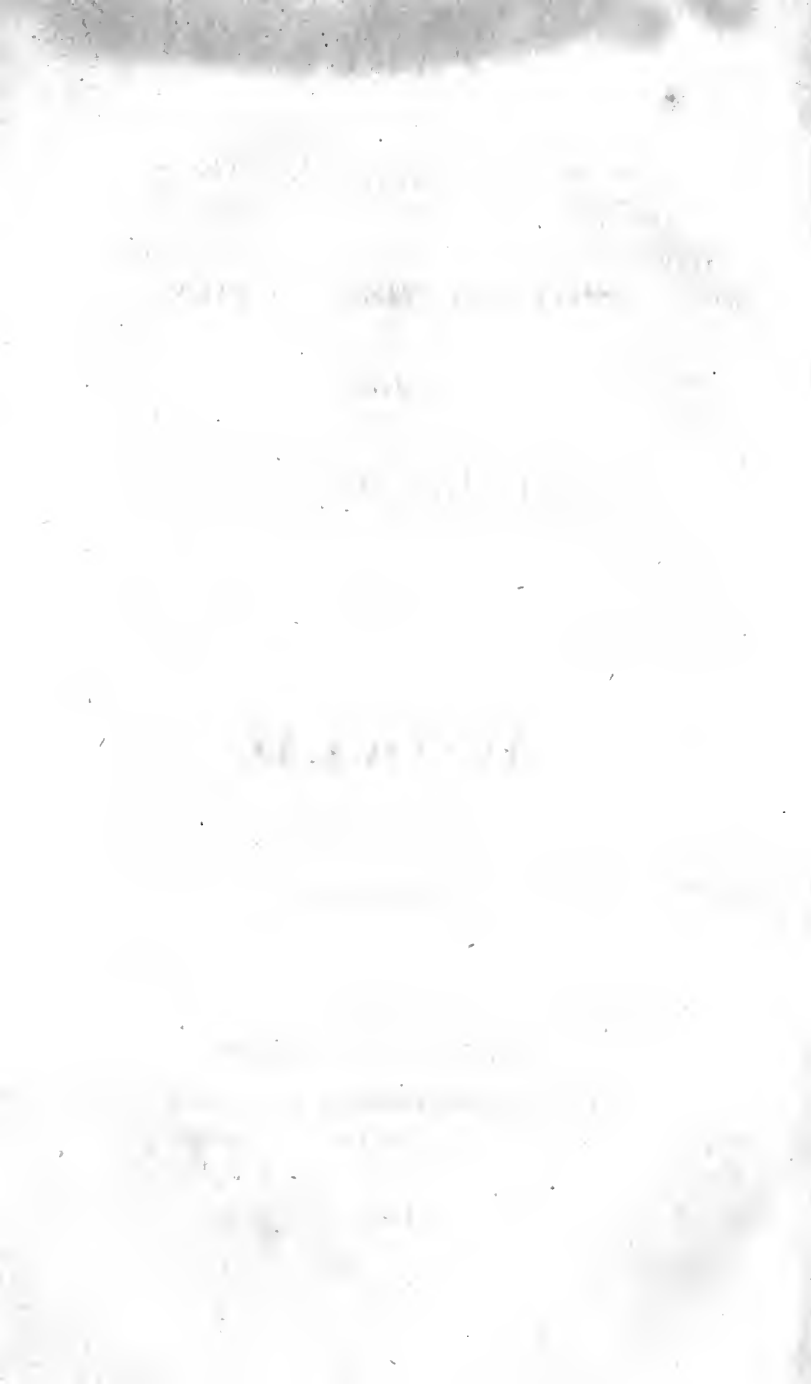
the globe, and to every neighbouring state; more particularly from the entrance of the English Channel to the frozen regions of the North. And when we recollect the vast commercial fleets which the enterprise of our merchants adventure into every sea, and during every season; when nearly a thousand sail of British vessels pass the Sound of the Baltic each year; ought we not to bear in mind to what hazards the subjects and vessels of Great Britain are constantly exposed, on the whole of so extended a coast, and in every stormy and dangerous sea? and shall we not be wanting to them and to humanity, if we do not endeavour to obtain for our own shipwrecked countrymen, in every foreign land, the same effectual aid in the hour of danger, which, I doubt not, it will become one of the proudest objects of this Institution to extend to the vessels of every nation which may be in distress on the British shores?

Thus would nations be drawn by mutual benefits into more strict bonds of amity, during peace, and thus might the rigours of war be ameliorated by having one common object of benevolence remaining; in the exercise of which the jealousies and angry passions incident to a state of hostility could not have any part with

a generous and high-minded people. The experience and penetration of liberal and enlightened governments could, without difficulty, form such arrangements as would prevent that which was intended as a benefit to mankind from being made subservient to any political abuse.

My utmost wishes would be accomplished by seeing these inter-national regulations established, in connexion with one great Institution, to extend to the most remote province of the empire, on the exalted principle, that wherever the British flag should fly, her seamen should be protected; and that those who risked their own lives to save those of their fellow-creatures from the perils of shipwreck should be honoured and rewarded: whilst every stranger, whom the disasters of the sea may cast on her shores, should never look for refuge in vain.

DOUGLAS, ISLE OF MAN,
28th Feb. 1823.



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